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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PBTS](#) [IR](#) [WI](#) [MO](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: HAMAS, IRAN, LEBANON, SYRIA, AND THE WESTERN
SAHARA ON THE MENU FOR MFA SECRETARY GENERAL LAMAMRA'S
LUNCH WITH NEA A/S WELCH

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Over a March 14 working lunch with MFA Secretary General Lamamra, NEA A/S Welch explained the U.S. view that taking the Iran nuclear issue to the Security Council would strengthen possibilities of resolving the problem through diplomacy; urged Algeria to ensure assistance was channeled to the Palestinian people and not to a Hamas-led government; said the United States sought changed Syrian behavior, not a change of regime; and argued that Hamas must go beyond acceptance of Arab League summit resolutions to accept the existence of Israel, renounce violence, and accept previous Palestinian commitments. On the Western Sahara, Welch said the U.S. supported a political solution within the framework of the UN and favored greater Maghreb cooperation and Algerian-Moroccan rapprochement. Lamamra reiterated that Algeria did not want to see Iran or any other country violate the NPT but was concerned that moving the Iran nuclear dossier to the Security Council could provoke international divisions and Iran's exit from the NPT. On Hamas, he argued it would be a mistake to try to isolate a Hamas-led government, signaled that Algerian assistance would continue, and was confident Hamas would have to moderate its current positions. On the Western Sahara, he said Moroccan unilateral moves would automatically be rejected; saw Morocco's rejection of the Baker Plan as a missed opportunity; stressed that the parties to the dispute were Morocco and the Polisario; and dismissed both France and Spain as either too biased or ambivalent to play a serious role in resolving the dispute. (End Summary.)

GOA RESERVATIONS ON OUR APPROACH TO IRAN

2. (C) Over lunch with Secretary General Lamamra and other MFA officials March 14, A/S Welch, accompanied by Ambassador, DCM and PolEc Chief, expressed disappointment over Algeria's abstention in the February 2 IAEA vote to send the Iran nuclear dossier to the UN Security Council. Iran had pursued an undeclared nuclear program for 18 years and, as a result, had lost the confidence of the international community. The U.S. believed taking the issue to the UNSC enhanced prospects of resolving the dispute through diplomacy. While Iran threatened to escalate the situation if the matter was turned over to the UNSC, we believed the greater risk came from the international community not standing firm on matters of principle.

3. (C) Lamamra said Algeria supported the right to develop peaceful uses of nuclear energy and did not want to see Iran or anyone else violate the NPT. It abstained in the IAEA vote because it worried that moving the issue to the Security Council risked dividing the international community. Welch noted there was, in the U.S. judgment, a solid majority of the UNSC in favor of a presidential statement laying out what was required of Iran. The U.S. chose this path precisely because it wanted to seek consensus. Lamamra said any vote of the UNSC on the issue implied a movement toward action under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter, something that Lamamra reiterated would divide the international community. Welch replied the real problem was that it was not at all clear the Iranians really wanted a solution. Iran was hoping to defeat the international community in a series of step-by-step maneuvers aimed at buying Tehran time to develop a nuclear weapon.

4. (C) Lamamra cautioned that Iran's withdrawal from the NPT a la North Korea was a real concern. Welch countered that Iran was not North Korea. The latter stayed inside itself and did not seek to project its influence. Iran, in contrast, sought to project its influence across the region and constituted a greater danger to the Arabs than to the

U.S. Asked about the possibility of dialogue with Iran, Welch said the U.S. did not see any moderate tendencies; Lamamra commented that the U.S. had become the "hated actor" in Iranian internal politics and that not all players in Iranian politics were satisfied with the direction the new president's policies were taking the country.

ISOLATING HAMAS WOULD BE A MISTAKE

15. (C) Turning to dealings with Hamas and the upcoming Arab League summit in Khartoum, A/S Welch said the new Palestinian Government should accept the results from Arab League summits in Beirut, Tunis, and Algiers. However, Hamas needed to go beyond that step, which was necessary but not sufficient. Hamas also had to accept the existence of Israel, renounce violence and terror, and accept inherited obligations such as Oslo. Signing up to the Arab League decisions alone was not enough. Lamamra argued that reducing assistance to the Palestinians would lead to more, not less, terrorism. Any time living standards diminished, terrorism increased. It was important to recognize that Hamas had won the elections democratically.

16. (C) Welch agreed that Hamas fairly won the elections and that it was essential to support the Palestinian people. There was a distinction, though, between support for the government and support for the people themselves. The U.S. would continue to support the Palestinian people, but it would not channel aid through government channels so long as Hamas refused to accept the pro-peace conditions of the international community, the Quartet, and even Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Mahmoud Abbas was also duly elected to his position and his mandate to work for a negotiated peace also had to be respected. Lamamra argued it would be a mistake to try to isolate a Hamas government and insisted that Algeria would continue to provide assistance.

17. (C) Welch suggested that the GOA continue to give money to the interim government. Once Hamas formed a new government, however, if it did not respond satisfactorily on Israel, violence, and in honoring Palestinian commitments, then the GOA should direct its assistance directly to the people, bypassing government channels. It would be easier to get the U.S. to say "yes" (i.e. accept a Hamas that had accepted the three conditions), Welch commented, than it would be to get Hamas to say "yes" to the U.S. conditions, which were also supported by Abbas and the Quartet. Lamamra said it was clear that Israel existed, and no one understood its existence better than the Palestinians, who lived with Israel every day. Why not expect Hamas to come around to stating the obvious? Welch said some believed Hamas was in fact pursuing a much more radical agenda. In this view, Hamas was a part of the Muslim Brotherhood and shared the Brotherhood's agenda and tactics. It sought to take over institutions step-by-step in a methodical effort that began in Gaza, continued to the West Bank and diaspora, and was now entering a new phase of conquest inside the Palestinian Authority. Welch challenged Algeria to dissuade Hamas from following that route. Lamamra said it was not in Algeria's interests to let that happen.

U.S. VIEW ON SYRIA AND LEBANON

18. (C) Lamamra asked Welch for the U.S. view on Lebanon and Syria. The A/S said the U.S. was being patient on implementation of UNSC Resolution 1559, insisting on Syrian withdrawal but not wanting to create more divisions by pushing for the immediate disarming of Hizballah. The first step is the Presidency, and there was now a consensus in Lebanon to change the President. The U.S. believed strongly that Syria needed to understand that there was a price to be paid for interference. Syria continued to use Hizballah as a proxy to attack Israel in order to divert attention from its own situation. Lahoud is Syria's agent. Washington wanted to protect Lebanon but also convince Syria to change behavior. We were not interested in regime change in Damascus, even though President Asad was not showing sufficient leadership and had underestimated the extent of Arab and international concern about his policies. The U.S. wanted the investigation into Hariri's murder to be credible; it would "go where it goes." Welch observed that if the Syrians had nothing to fear as they maintain, they should cooperate fully with the investigation.

UNILATERAL MOVES ON WESTERN SAHARA WILL BE REJECTED

19. (C) Welch noted that Algeria was an important player in the region, with an important voice, and that we hoped to see improved relations between Algeria and Morocco and greater cooperation throughout the Maghreb. On the Western Sahara, Welch said the U.S. continued to support a political solutionQ the UN framework. There was no disposition in Washington to insert ourselves in finding a solution. Baker was a heavy-weight in the U.S. system, and we were all disappointed that his efforts to resolve the issue of the Western Sahara did not bear fruit. The U.S. continued to want increased security and stability in the area and was urging Morocco to develop its autonomy ideas. Better Moroccan-Algeria bilateral relations in our view would improve the overall environment for resolving the Western Sahara issue.

¶10. (C) Lamamra argued that Algeria had really hoped the Baker Plan would succeed. He offered that the 1988 communiqué issued by Morocco and Algeria announcing the resumption of their diplomatic relations called for the respect of previous agreements, further integration, and a referendum for the Sahrawis living in the Western Sahara. Under the Baker Plan, given the influx of Moroccans who would have been able to vote, it was arithmetically possible for Morocco to win the envisaged referendum. He also suggested that it would have also been possible to extend the period of autonomy under the Baker Plan. There was much opportunity for forging a creative solution, stressed Lamamra. Morocco's rejection of holding a referendum and of self-determination did not help. Unilateral decisions of this nature would automatically be rejected by the Polisario. It was important that the UN remain fully involved in resolving the status of the Western Sahara so as not to send the wrong message to Morocco.

¶11. (C) Lamamra argued that recognition by 74 countries of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic was evidence that the international community had grown tired of Morocco's stalling. The enemy for Morocco was no longer the Polisario on the other side of the berm; it was the Sahrawis demonstrating against Moroccan occupation on the western side of the berm. Lamamra said he hoped the UNHRC would be able to visit the Moroccan side of the berm and observe the situation. A/S Welch said the U.S. supported access for human rights organizations. Asked for Algeria's assessment of other key nations' roles on the Western Sahara, Lamamra dismissed France as being completely in the Moroccan camp and Spain as being only marginally less unreliable due to its ambivalence and the fact that the Western Sahara was a domestic issue in Spain.

¶12. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this message.

ERDMAN